ON THE INTERPRETATION OF GENESIS

by

LEO STRAUSS

This is the text of a lecture given by Leo Strauss in the "Works of the Mind" series at University College, University of Chicago, January 25, 1957. It is published here for the first time. Our thanks are due to Mr. Joseph Cropsey, Professor at the University of Chicago and Leo Strauss's literary executor, who authorized us to publish the text, and helped me with some minor revisions of it.

The anthropologically-minded reader will probably be struck by some similarities between Strauss's approach of the Bible and Claude Lévi-Strauss's approach in the analysis of myth—which is the more striking as this text is more or less contemporary with the first works of Lévi-Strauss in the domain of myth. This is not the place to discuss those similarities as well as, maybe, possible differences between the two approaches. Let me just say that Leo Strauss is a philosopher (the first sentence of the text must, I think, be taken with a grain of salt); his ultimate purpose may be different from that of Lévi-Strauss.

Here are a few bibliographical references which may help the reader understand the place of this text in Leo Strauss's thinking. A good introduction to Strauss's thought will be found in: Allan Bloom, "Leo Strauss", Political Theory, *1974, 2 (4): 373-392, and a shorter presentation, with an almost complete bibliography, in Joseph Cropsey, "Leo Strauss. A Bibliography and Memorial",* Interpretation, *1975, 5 (2) (Queen's College, NY): 133-147. Two other articles especially complement this one: "Jerusalem and Athens. Some Preliminary Reflections",* The City College Papers, *1967, 6 (City University of New York) (abridged version in* Commentary, *1967, 43 (6): 45-57)—and "The Mutual Influence of Theology and Philosophy",* The Independent Journal of Philosophy, *1979, 3: 111-118 (also a lecture given at Chicago in the '50s). Let us finally mention that a former student of Strauss's, Robert Sacks, has begun to publish an extensive commentary of the Book of Genesis, where he develops at length Strauss's suggestions; see Robert Sacks, "The Lion and the Ass. A Commentary on the Book of Genesis",* Interpretation, *1980, 8 (2-3): 29-101 (ch. 1-10 of Genesis; to be continued) (Queen's College, NY).* [Nicolas Ruwet]

L'Homme, janv.-mars 1981, XXI (1), pp. 5-20.

I want to begin with the remark that I am not a biblical scholar; I am a political scientist specializing in political theory. Political theory is frequently said to be concerned with the values of the Western world. These values, as is well-known, are partly of biblical and partly of Greek origin. The political theorist must, therefore, have an inkling of the agreement as well as the disagreement between the biblical and the Greek heritage. Everyone working in my field has to rely most of the time on what biblical scholars or classical scholars tell him about the Bible on the one hand and Greek thought on the other. Still I thought it would be defensible if I were to try to see whether I could not understand something of the Bible without relying entirely on what the authorities both contemporary and traditional tell me. I began with the beginning because this choice seems to me to be least arbitrary. I have been asked to speak here about Genesis—or rather about the beginning of Genesis. The context of a series of lectures on the "Works of the Mind" raises immediately a very grave question. Works of the mind are works of the human mind. Is the Bible a work of the human mind? Is it not the work of God? The work of God, of the divine mind? The latter view was generally accepted in former ages. We have to reflect on this alternative approach to the Bible because this alternative is decisive as to the way in which we will read the Bible. If the Bible is a work of the human mind, it has to be read like any other book—like Homer, like Plato, like Shakespeare—with respect but also with willingness to argue with the author, to disagree with him, to criticize him. If the Bible is the work of God, it has to be read in an entirely different spirit than the way in which we must read the human books. The Bible has to be read in a spirit of pious submission, of reverent hearing. According to this view only a believing and pious man can understand the Bible—the substance of the Bible. According to the view which prevails today, the unbeliever, provided he is a man of the necessary experience or sensitivity, can understand the Bible as well as the believer. This difference between the two approaches can be described as follows. In the past the Bible was universally read as the document of revelation. Today it is frequently read as one great document of the human mind among many such documents. Revelation is a miracle. This means, therefore, that before we even open the Bible we must have made up our minds as to whether we believe in the possibility of miracles. Obviously we read the account of the burning bush or the Red Sea deliverance in an entirely different way in correspondence with the way in which we have decided previously regarding the possibility of miracles. Either we regard miracles as impossible or we regard them as possible or else we do not know whether miracles are possible or not. The last view at first glance recommends itself as the one most agreeable to our ignorance or, which is the same thing, as most open-minded.

I must explain this briefly. The question as to whether miracles are possible

or not depends on the previous question as to whether God as an omnipotent being exists. Many of our contemporaries assume tacitly or even explicitly that we know that God as an omnipotent being does not exist. I believe that they are wrong; for how could we know that God as an omnipotent being does not exist? Not from experience. Experience cannot show more than that the conclusion from the world, from its manifest order and from its manifest rhythm, to an omnipotent creator is not valid. Experience can show at most that the contention of biblical faith is improbable; but the improbable character of biblical belief is admitted and even proclaimed by the biblical faith itself. The faith could not be meritorious if it were not faith against heavy odds. The next step of a criticism of the biblical faith would be guided by the principle of contradiction alone. For example, people would say that divine omniscience—and there is no omnipotence without omniscience—is incompatible with human freedom. They contradict each other. But all criticism of this kind presupposes that it is at all possible to speak about God without making contradictory statements. If God is incomprehensible and yet not unknown, and this is implied in the idea of God's omnipotence, it is impossible to speak about God without making contradictory statements about him. The comprehensible God, the God about whom we can speak without making contradictions, we can say is the God of Aristotle and not the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. There is then only one way in which the belief in an omnipotent God can be refuted, by showing that there is no mystery whatever, that we have clear and distinct knowledge, or scientific knowledge, in principle of everything, that we can give an adequate and clear account of everything, that all fundamental questions have been answered in a perfectly satisfactory way, in other words that there exists what we may call the absolute and final philosophic system. According to that system (there was such a system; its author was Hegel) the previously hidden God, the previously incomprehensible God, has now become perfectly revealed, perfectly comprehensible. I regard the existence of such a system as at least as improbable as the truth of the Bible. But, obviously, the improbability of the truth of the Bible is a contention of the Bible whereas the improbability of the truth of the perfect philosophic system creates a serious difficulty for that system. If it is true then that human reason cannot prove the non-existence of God as an omnipotent being, it is, I believe, equally true that human reason cannot establish the existence of God as an omnipotent being. From this it follows that in our capacity as scholars or scientists we are reduced to a state of doubt in regard to the most important question. We have no choice but to approach the Bible in this state of doubt as long as we claim to be scholars or men of science. Yet that is possible only against a background of knowledge.

What then do we know? I disregard the innumerable facts which we know,

for knowledge of mere facts is not knowledge, not true knowledge. I also disregard our knowledge of scientific laws for these laws are admittedly open to future revision. We might say, what we truly know are not any answers to comprehensive questions but only these questions, questions imposed upon us as human beings by our situation as human beings. This presupposes that there is a fundamental situation of man as man which is not affected by any change, any so-called historical change in particular. It is man's fundamental situation within the whole—within a whole that is so little subject to historical change that it is a condition of every possible historical change. But how do we know that there is this whole? If we know this, we can know it only by starting from what we may call the phenomenal world, the given whole, the whole which is permanently given, as permanently as are human beings, the whole which is held together and constituted by the vault of heaven and comprising heaven and earth and everything that is within heaven and on earth and between heaven and earth. All human thought, even all thought human or divine, which is meant to be understood by human beings willy nilly begins with this whole, the permanently given whole which we all know and which men always know. The Bible begins with an articulation of the permanently given whole; this is one articulation of the permanently given whole among many such articulations. Let us see whether we can understand that biblical articulation of the given whole.

The Bible begins at the beginning. It says something about the beginning. Who says that in the beginning God created heaven and earth? Who says it we are not told; hence we do not know. Is this silence about the speaker at the beginning of the Bible due to the fact that it does not make a difference who says it? This would be a philosopher's reason. Is it also the biblical reason? We are not told; hence we do not know. The traditional view is that God said it. Yet the Bible introduces God's speeches by "and God said" and this is not said at the beginning. We may, therefore, believe the first chapter of Genesis is said by a nameless man. Yet he cannot have been an eye-witness of what he tells. No man can have been an eye-witness of the creation; the only eye-witness was God. Must not, therefore, the account be ascribed to God as was traditionally done? But we have no right to assert this as definite. The beginning of the Bible is not readily intelligible. It is strange. But the same applies to the content of the account. "In the beginning God created heaven and earth; and the earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." It would appear, if we take this literally, that the earth in its primeval form, without form and void, was not created, the creation was formation rather than creation out of nothing. And what does it mean that the spirit was moving upon the face of the waters? And what does "the deep", which is perhaps a residue of certain Babylonian stories, mean? Furthermore, if in the beginning God created heaven and earth

and all the other things in six days, the days cannot be days in the ordinary sense, for days in the ordinary sense are determined by the movements of the sun. Yet the sun was created only on the fourth creation day. In brief all these difficulties, and we could add to them, create the impression, which is shared by many people today, that this is a so-called mythical account. This means in fact, as most people understand it, that we abandon the attempt to understand.

I believe we must take a somewhat different approach. Fortunately, not everything is strange in this account. Some of the things mentioned in it are known to us. Perhaps we may begin with that part of the first chapter of Genesis which we can understand. The Hebrew word for creation used there is applied in the Bible only to God. Yet this term, *bara,* is used synonymously, at least apparently, with the Hebrew word for doing or making, *asah.* In one case, and twice in this special case, doing or making is used of something other than God: the fruit tree making the fruit, to translate literally. So here we have another case of creation. The word *bara* is applied only to God. What this means is not explained in the Bible. But there is a synonymous term *(asah)* for creating—making—which is applied also to other beings, to trees for example, to say nothing of human beings. Let us therefore see what this word *making* means in the cases in which it occurs within the first chapter of Genesis. The fruit tree making fruit, what kind of making is this? The fruit is originated almost entirely by the tree and, as it were, within the tree. Secondly, the fruit does not have the looks of a tree. Thirdly, the fruit is a complete and finished product. And last, the fruit can be separated from the tree. Perhaps creation has a certain kinship with this kind of making as distinguished from the following kinds of making: First, the making of something which does not originate almost entirely in the maker, artifacts, which require clay and so on in addition to the maker; secondly, the making of something which looks like the maker, the generation of animals; third, the making of something which is not complete but needs additional making or doing, the eggs; and finally, the making of something which cannot be separated from the maker: for example, deeds, human deeds, cannot be separated from the man who does them (deeds and makings would be the same word in Hebrew). We keep only one thing in mind: creation seems to be the making of separable things, just as fruits are separable from trees; creation seems to have something to do with separation. The first chapter of the Bible mentions separation quite often—I mean the term; five times it is explicitly mentioned and ten times implicitly in expressions like "after its kind" which means, of course, the distinction or separation of one kind from the other. Creation is the making of separated things, of species of plants, animals and so on; and creation means even the making of separating things—heaven separates water from water, the heavenly bodies separate day from night.

Let us consider now the most glaring difficulty, namely the difficulty created by the fact that the Bible speaks of days prior to the creation of the sun. The sun was created only on the fourth creation day. We have no difficulty in admitting that the sun came into being so late; every natural scientist would say this today; but the Bible tells us that the sun was created after the plants and trees, the vegetative world, was created. The vegetative world was created on the third day and the sun on the fourth day. That is the most massive difficulty of the account given in the first chapter of the Bible. From what point of view is it intelligible that the vegetative world should precede the sun? How are the vegetative world, on the one hand, and the sun, on the other, understood so that it makes sense to say the vegetative world precedes the sun? The creation of the vegetative world takes place on the third day, on the same day on which the earth and the sea were created first. The vegetative world is explicitly said to have been brought forth by the earth. The vegetative world belongs to the earth. Hence the Bible does not mention any divine making in the creation of the vegetative world. The earth is told by God to bring forth the plants, and the earth brings them forth, whereas God made the world of heaven and sun and moon and stars, and above all God commands the earth to bring forth the animals and God made the animals. The earth does not bring them forth. The vegetative world belongs to the earth. It is, we may say, the covering of the earth, as it were, the skin of the earth, if it could produce skin. It is not separable from the earth. The vegetative world is created on the same day on which the earth and the seas are created; the third day is the day of the double creation. In most of the six cases, one thing or a set of things is created. Only on the third day and the sixth day are there double creations. On the sixth day the terrestrial brutes and man are created. There seems to be here a kind of parallelism in the biblical account. There are two series of creation, each of three days. The first begins with the creation of light, the second with that of the sun. Both series end with a double creation. The first half ends with the vegetative world, the second half ends with man. The vegetative world is characterized by the fact that it is not separable from the earth. Could the distinction between the non-separable and the separable be the principle underlying the division? This is not sufficient. The kinds of plants are separable from each other, although they are not separable from the earth; and creation altogether is a kind of separation. Creation is the making of separated things, of things or groups of things which are separated from each other, which are distinguished from each other, which are distinguishable, which are discernible. But that which makes possible distinguishing and discerning is light. The first thing created is, therefore, light. Light is the beginning, the principle of distinction or separation. Light is the work of the first day. We know light primarily as the light of the sun. The sun is the most important source of light

for us. The sun belongs to the work of the fourth day. There is a particularly close kinship between light and the sun. This kinship is expressed by the fact that the light is the beginning of the first half of the creation and the sun is the beginning of the second half of creation.

If this is so we are compelled to raise this question: could the second half of creation have a principle of its own, a principle different from light or separation or distinction? This must be rightly understood. Separations or distinctions are obviously preserved in the second half. Men are distinguished from brutes, for example. Hence, a principle different from light or separation or distinction would have to be one which is based on, or which presupposes, separation or distinction but which is not reductible to separation or distinction. The sun presupposes light but is not light. Now let us look at the creations of the fourth to sixth days—on the fourth day, sun, moon and stars; on the fifth day, the water animals and birds; on the sixth day, land animals and man. Now what is common to all creations of the second half? I would say local motion. I shall therefore suggest that the principle of the first half is separation or distinction simply. The principle of the second half, the fourth to sixth day, is local motion. It is for this reason and for this very important reason that the vegetative world precedes the sun; the vegetative world lacks local motion. The sun is what it is by rising and setting, by coming and going, by local motion. The difficulty from which I started is solved or almost solved once one realizes that the account of creation consists of two main parts which are parallel. The first part begins with light, the second part begins with the sun. Similarly there is a parallelism of the end of the two parts. Only on the third and sixth days were there two acts of creation. To repeat, on the third day, earth and seas and the vegetative world; on the sixth day, the land animals and man. I have said that the principle of the first half of creation is separation or distinction and that of the second half of the creation is local motion, but in such a way that separation or distinction is preserved in the idea underlying the second part, namely local motion. Local motion must be understood, in other words, as a higher form of separation. Local motion is separation of a higher order, because local motion means not merely for a thing to be separated from other things; an oak tree is separated or distinguished from an apple tree. Local motion is separation of a higher order because it means not merely for a thing to be separated from other things but to be able to separate itself from its place, to be able to be set off against a background which appears as a background by virtue of the thing's moving. The creation of the heavenly bodies on the fourth day is immediately followed by the creation of the water animals and the birds. These animals are the first creatures which are blessed by God and he blesses them by addressing them: "Be fruitful and multiply." They are the first creatures which are addressed, addressed in the second person—not like the earth: "the earth should bring

forth"; whereas the earth and water are addressed, they are not addressed in the second person. Water animals and birds belong to the class, or the genus, of living beings. (I try to translate the Hebrew term.) What does it mean that on the fourth day we have the first beings capable of local motion, the heavenly bodies, and that on the fifth day we have animals? Local motion is followed by life. Life too must be understood as a form of separation. In the first place life is here characterized by the capacity of being addressed, of hearing, of sense-perception. It is of the greatest importance that the Bible singles out hearing and not seeing or touch as characteristic of the living being. But for our present purpose it is more important to note that animal life appears in the context of the whole chapter as representing a still higher degree of separation than do the heavenly bodies. Animals can change not only their place; but also their courses. The sun and moon and stars cannot change their courses, except miraculously; but, as you see from every dog for example when he's running along, he can change his course; as a matter of fact, he doesn't have such a course. Animals are not limited to changing their places. From this it follows that the being created last, namely man, is characterized by the fact that he is a creature which is separated in the highest degree; man is the only being created in the image of God. If we consider the parallelism of man and plants and that plants are the only creatures to which the term *making* is explicitly ascribed, we may also recognize that man is capable of doing, making deeds, to the highest degree of all creatures.

It seems then that the sequence of creation in the first chapter of the Bible can be stated as follows: from the principle of separation, light; via something which separates, heaven; to something which is separated, earth and sea; to things which are productive of separated things, trees, for example; then things which can separate themselves from their places, heavenly bodies; then things which can separate themselves from their courses, brutes; and finally a being which can separate itself from its way, the right way. I repeat, the clue to the first chapter seems to be the fact that the account of creation consists of two main parts. This implies that the created world is conceived to be characterized by a fundamental dualism: things which are different from each other without having the capacity of local motion and things which in addition to being different from each other do have the capacity of local motion. This means the first chapter seems to be based on the assumption that the fundamental dualism is that of distinctness, otherness, as Plato would say, and of local motion. To understand the character of this dualism, otherness, and local motion, let us confront it with the only other fundamental dualism referred to in the chapter. I quote the twenty-sixth verse :"and God created man in his image, in his image, in the image of God, did God create him, male and female did he create them". That is a very difficult sentence. The dualism of the male and female could

well be used for the fundamental articulation of the world and it was used in this way in many cosmogonies—the male and female gender of nouns seems to correspond to the male and female gender of all things and this could lead to the assumption of two principles, a male and a female, a highest god and a highest goddess. The Bible disposes of this possibility by ascribing the dualism of male and female, as it were, to God himself by locating, as it were, the root of their dualism within God. God created man in his image and, therefore, he created him male and female. And also the Bible mentions the distinction of male and female only in the case of man, hence saying, as it were, that male and female are not universal characters. There are many things that are neither male nor female but all things are what they are by being distinguished from each other; and all things are either fixed to a place or capable of local motion. Therefore, the fundamental dualism, male and female, is replaced by the fundamental dualism, distinctness, or otherness, and local motion. This latter dualism, distinctness–local motion, does not lend itself to the assumption of two gods, a distinguishing god and a moving god, as it were. Furthermore, it excludes the possibility of conceiving of the coming into being of the world as an act of generation, the parents being two gods, a male and a female god; or, it disposes of the possibility of conceiving of the coming into being of the world itself, as a progeny of a male and of a female god. The dualism chosen by the Bible, the dualism as distinguished from the dualism of male and female, is not sensual but intellectual, noetic, and this may help to explain the parodox that plants precede the sun. Another point which I mentioned of which I will have to make use: all created beings mentioned in the Bible are non-mythical beings in the vulgar sense of the word; I mean they are all beings which we know from daily sense-perception. Having reached this point, we reconsider the order of creation: the first thing created is light, something which does not have a place. All later creatures have a place. The things which have a place either do not consist of heterogeneous parts—heaven, earth, seas; or they do consist of heterogeneous parts, namely, of species or individuals. Or as we might prefer to say, the things which have a place either do not have a definite place but rather fill a whole region, or something to be filled—heaven, earth, seas; or else they do consist of heterogeneous parts, of species and individuals or they do not fill a whole region but a place within a region, within the sea, within heaven, on earth. The things which fill a place within a region either lack local motion—the plants; or they possess local motion. Those which possess local motion either lack life, the heavenly bodies; or they possess life. The living beings are either non-terrestrial, water animals and birds; or they are terrestrial. The terrestrial living beings are either not created in the image of God, brutes; or in the image of God—man. In brief, the first chapter of Genesis is based on a division by two, or what Plato calls *diairēsis* (division by two).

These considerations show, it seems to me, how unreasonable it is to speak of the mythical or pre-logical character of biblical thought as such. The account of the world given in the first chapter of the Bible is not fundamentally different from philosophic accounts; that account is based on evident distinctions which are as accessible to us as they were to the biblical author. Hence we can understand that account; these distinctions are accessible to man as man. We can readily understand why we should find something of this kind in the Bible. An account of the creation of the world, or more generally stated, a cosmogony, necessarily presupposes an articulation of the world, of the completed world, of the cosmos, that is to say, a cosmology. The biblical account of creation is based on a cosmology. All the created things mentioned in the Bible are accessible to man as man regardless of differences of climate, origin, religion, or anything else. Someone might say, that is very well, we all know what sun, moon, and stars, fruits and plants are, but what about the light as distinguished from the sun? Who knows it? But do we not all know a light which is not derivative from the sun, empirically, ordinarily? I say yes, lightning. And perhaps there is a connection between what the Bible says about the light and the biblical understanding of lightning. The Bible starts then from the world as we know it and as men always knew it and will know it, prior to any explanation, mythical or scientific. I make only this remark about the word "world". The word "world" does not occur in the Bible. The Hebrew Bible says "heaven and earth" where we would ordinarily say "world". The Hebrew word which is mostly translated by "world" means something different; it means, in the first place, the remote past, "once" in the sense of "then", the early time or since early time. It means secondly "once" or "then" in the future. And it means finally, "once and for all", for all times, never ceasing, permanent. It means, therefore, that which is permanent. The Hebrew word for world in other words means, therefore, primarily something connected with time, a character of time rather than something which we see. If there are other beings mentioned in other cosmogonies where all kinds of so-called mythical beings are mentioned, for example, in Babylonian stories, we must go back behind these dragons or what-not, at least, by wondering whether these beings exist. And we must go back to those things mentioned in the first chapter of the Bible and familiar to all of us now and familiar to all men at all times. The Bible really begins, in this sense also, with the beginning.

But you will say, and quite rightly, that what I have discussed is the least important part or aspect of the first chapter. The cosmology used by the biblical author is not the theme of the biblical author. That cosmology, that articulation of the visible universe is the unthematic presupposition of the biblical author. His theme is that the world has been created by God in these and these stages. We prepare our reflection on this theme by considering another feature of the

account which we have disregarded hitherto. The Bible in this first chapter makes a distinction between things which are named by God and things which are not named by God and a distinction between things which are called good by God and things which are not called good by God. The things named by God are day, as the name of light, and night, as the name of darkness, and furthermore, heaven, earth, and seas. All other things are not named by God; only these general things, only the things which lack particularization, which do not have a place, properly speaking, are named by God. The rest is left to be named by man. Almost all things are called good by God; the only ones excepted are heaven and man. But one can say that it was not necessary to call man good, explicitly, because man is the only being created in the image of God and because man is blessed by God. However this may be, certainly the only thing which is not called good without being redeemed, as it were, by being blessed by God or by being said to be created in the image of God, is heaven. We may say that the concern of the author of this chapter is a depreciation or a demotion of heaven; in accordance with this, creation appears to be preceded by a kind of rudimentary earth, "in the beginning God created heaven and earth, and the earth. . .". There is no kind of rudimentary heaven, and the heavenly bodies, sun, moon, and stars are, according to the first chapter, nothing but tools, instruments for giving light to the earth; and, most important, these heavenly bodies are lifeless; they are not gods. Heaven is depreciated in favor of the earth, life on earth, man. What does this mean? For cosmology, strictly understood, Greek cosmology, heaven is a more important theme than earth, than life on earth. Heaven means for the Greek thinkers the same as the world, the cosmos. Heaven means a whole, the vault which comprises everything else. Life on earth needs heaven, rain, and not vice versa. And if the more sophisticated Greek cosmologists realized that one cannot leave it at the primacy of heaven, they went beyond heaven, as Plato says, to a super-heavenly place. The human thing is a word of depreciation in Greek philosophy.

There is then a deep opposition between the Bible and cosmology proper, and since all philosophy is cosmology ultimately, between the Bible and philosophy. The Bible proclaims cosmology is a non-thematic implication of the story of creation. It is necessary to articulate the visible universe and understand its character only for the sake of saying that the visible universe, the world, was created by God. The Bible is distinguished from all philosophy because it simply asserts that the world is created by God. There is not a trace of an argument in support of this assertion. How do we know that the world was created? The Bible declared it so. We know it by virtue of declaration, pure and simple, by divine utterance ultimately. Therefore, all knowledge of the createdness of the world has an entirely different character than our knowledge of the structure or articulation of the world. The articulation of the world, the essential distinction

between the plants, brutes, and so on, is accessible to man as man; but our knowledge of the createdness of the world is not evident knowledge. I will read you a few verses from Deuteronomy, chapter 4, verses 15 to 19, "Take ye, therefore, good heed unto yourselves for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire, lest ye corrupt yourselves and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl that flieth in the air, the likeness of any thing that creepeth on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the waters beneath the earth; and lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the Lord thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven", which means which the Lord thy God has assigned, attributed to all nations under the whole heaven. All nations, all men as men cannot help but be led to this cosmic religion, if they do not go beyond the created things. "But the Lord has taken you and brought you forth out of the iron furnace out of Egypt, to be under Him a people of inheritance as you are this day." In other words, the fact that the world has a certain structure is known to man as man. That the world is created is known by the fact that God speaks to Israel on the Horeb; that is the reason why Israel knows that sun and moon and stars do not deserve worship, that heaven must be depreciated in favor of human life on earth, and ultimately, that the origin of the world is divine creation. There is no argument in favor of creation except God speaking to Israel. He who has not heard that speech either directly or by tradition will worship the heavenly bodies, will remain, in other words, within the horizon of cosmology.

I would like to say a very few words about the second chapter, because one great difficulty of the beginning of the Bible is that there is a two-fold account of creation, one in chapter one and another in chapters two to three. The first chapter of the Bible contains a cosmology which is overarched by an account of the creation of the world, a cosmology which is integrated into an account of the creation of the world. This integration of cosmology into an account of creation implies the depreciation of heaven. Heaven is not divine; heaven is subordinate in rank to earth, to life on earth. But this cosmology used by the Bible, as distinguished from the assertion regarding creation, I mean the articulation of the visible world, this cosmology is based on evidence accessible to man as man, whereas the assertion of the createdness of the world is not based on such evidence. Hence the question arises: with what right is the horizon of cosmology, of the things we see, describe and understand, transcended, or, in other words, what's wrong with cosmology? What is wrong with man's effort to find his bearing in the light of what is evident to man as man? What is the

true character of human life? What is the right life of man? This question is the starting point of the second account of creation in the second chapter. The first account ends with man; the second account begins with man. It seems that an account which ends with man is not sufficient. Why? In the first account, man is created on the same day as the terrestrial animals, he is seen as part of the whole,—if as its most exalted part. In this perspective, the absolute difference between man and all other creatures is not adequately seen. It appears from the first account that man is separated to the highest degree, that he can move or change his place, in a very metaphorical sense even, to the highest degree. But this privilege, this liberty, freedom, is also a great danger. Man is the most ambiguous creature; hence man is not called good, just as heaven is not called good. There is a connection between the ambiguity of man, the danger to which man is essentially exposed, and heaven, with what heaven stands for, the attempt to find one's bearing in the light of what is evident to man as man, the attempt to possess knowledge of good and evil like the gods. Now if man is the most ambiguous creature, in fact the only ambiguous creature, we need a supplement to that account in which man appears also as part of the whole. We need an account which focuses on man alone; more precisely, since ambiguity means ambiguity in regard to good and evil, we need an additional account in which man's place is defined, not only as it was in the first account by a command "Be fruitful and multiply" in general, but by a negative command, a prohibition. For a prohibition sets forth explicitly the limitations of man—up to this point and not beyond!—the limit separating the good from the evil. The second chapter of the Bible answers the question not about how the world has come into being but how human life, human life as we know it, has come into being. Just as the answer to the question regarding the world as a whole, requires an articulation of the world, the answer to the question regarding human life requires an articulation of human life. Human life, the life of most men, is the life of tillers of the soil or is at least based on that life. If you do not believe the Bible, you may believe Aristotle's *Politics*. Human life is, therefore, characterized most obviously by need for rain and need for hard work. Now, this cannot have been the character of human life at the beginning; for if man was needy from the very beginning, and essentially, he is compelled or at least seriously tempted to be harsh, uncharitable, unjust; he is not fully responsible for his lack of charity or justice because of his neediness. But somehow we know that man is responsible for his lack of charity and justice; therefore, his original state must have been one in which he was not forced or seriously tempted to be uncharitable or unjust. Man's original condition was, therefore, a garden, surrounded by rivers; originally man did not need rain nor hard work; there was a state of affluence and of ease. The present state of man is due to man's fault, to his transgression of a prohibition with which he could easily have complied. But

man was created in the image of God, in a way like God. Was he not, therefore, congenitally tempted to transgress any prohibitions, any limitations? Was this likeness to God not a constant temptation to be literally like Him? To dispose of this difficulty the second account of creation distributes accents differently than the first account had done. Man is now said to be, not created in the image of God, but dust from the earth. Furthermore, in the first account man is created as the ruler of the beasts. In the second account the beasts come to sight rather as helpers or companions of man. Man is created in lowliness; he was not tempted therefore to disobey either by need or by his high estate. Furthermore, in the first account man and woman were created in one act. In the second account, man is created first, thereafter the brutes, and finally only the woman out of the rib of man. Woman, that is the presupposition, is lower than man. And this low creature, I apologize, woman, lower still than man, begins the transgression. Disobedience is shockingly ill founded. Note, furthermore, that in spite of these differences, the second account fundamentally continues the tendency of the first account in two points. First, there was no need for rain at the beginning, which again means a depreciation of heaven, the source of rain. And secondly, the derivative character of woman implies a further depreciation of the dualism male/female which plays such a role in the first part. Only one more word about this second chapter. Man's original sin, original transgression, consisted in eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. We have no reason to suppose on the basis of the biblical account, as distinguished from later explanations, that man was guided by desire for knowledge of good and evil for he would have had to have some knowledge of good and evil in order to have such desire. It is even hard to say that man desired to transgress the divine command. It comes out rather accidentally. Man's transgression is a mystery, but he did transgress and he knew that he did. Man certainly chose to disobey. He chose therewith the principle of disobedience. This principle is called knowledge of good and evil. We may say that disobedience means autonomous knowledge of good and evil, a knowledge which man possesses by himself, the implication being that the true knowledge is not autonomous; and, in the light of later theological developments, one could say the true knowledge of good and evil is supplied only by revelation.

What I am suggesting then is this: the crucial thesis of the first chapter, if we approach it from the point of view of Western thought in general, is the depreciation of heaven. Heaven is a primary theme of cosmology and of philosophy. The second chapter contains this explicit depreciation of the knowledge of good and evil, which is only another aspect of the thought expressed in the first chapter. For what does forbidden knowledge of good and evil mean? It means ultimately such knowledge of good and evil as is based on the understanding of the nature of things, as philosophers would say; but that means, somewhat

more simply expressed, knowledge of good and evil which is based on the contemplation of heaven. The first chapter, in other words, questions the primary theme of philosophy; and the second chapter questions the intention of philosophy. The biblical authors, as far as we know, did not know anything of philosophy, strictly so-called. But we must not forget that they were probably familiar, and certainly familiar with certain things, in Babylon for example, which are primitive forms of philosophy, contemplation of heaven and becoming wise in human conduct through the contemplation of heaven. The fundamental idea is the same as that of philosophy in the original sense. Chapters two and three of Genesis are animated by the same spirit as the first chapter; what the Bible presents is the alternative to the temptation and this temptation we can call, in the light of certain things we happen to know, philosophy. The Bible, therefore, confronts us more clearly than any other book with this fundamental alternative: life in obedience to revelation, life in obedience, or life in human freedom, the latter being represented by the Greek philosophers. This alternative has never been disposed of, although there are many people who believe that there can be a happy synthesis which is superior to the isolated elements: Bible on the one hand and philosophy on the other. This is impossible. Syntheses always sacrifice the decisive claim of one of the two elements. And I shall be glad if we can take up this point in the discussion.

I would like to make only one concluding remark because I understand that in this group you are particularly interested in books. And therefore I would like to say something about the problem of books in so far as it affects the Bible on the one hand and philosophy on the other. The Greek philosophic view has as its primary basis the simple notion, that contemplation of heaven, an understanding of heaven, is the ground by which we are led to the right conduct. True knowledge, the Greek philosophers said, is knowledge of what is always. Knowledge of the things which are not always, and especially knowledge of what happened in the past, is knowledge of an entirely inferior character. As regards knowledge of the remote past, in particular, it comes to be regarded as particularly uncertain. When Herodotus speaks of the first inventor of the various arts he does not say, as the Bible does, that X was the first inventor of this or that art. Herodotus says he was the first inventor as far as we know. Now this kind of thought, which underlies all Greek thought, creates as its vehicle the book, in the strict sense of the term, the book as a work of art. The book in this sense is a conscious imitation of living beings. There is no part of it, however small and seemingly insignificant, which is not necessary so that the whole can fulfill well its function. When the artisan or artist is absent or even dead, the book is living in a sense. Its function is to arouse to thinking, to independent thinking, those who are capable of it; the author of the book, in this highest sense, is sovereign. He determines what ought to be the beginning and the end and the

center. He refuses admission to every thought, to every image, to every feeling which is not evidently necessary for the purpose or the function of the book. Aptness and graces are nothing except handmaids of wisdom. The perfect book is an image or an imitation of that all-comprehensiveness and perfect evidence of knowledge which is aspired to but not reached. The perfect book acts, therefore, as a countercharm to the charm of despair which the never satisfied quest for perfect knowledge necessarily engenders. It is for this reason that Greek philosophy is inseparable from Greek poetry. Now let us look, on the other hand, at the Bible. The Bible rejects the principle of autonomous knowledge and everything that goes with it. The mysterious God is the last theme and highest theme of the Bible. Given the biblical premise, there cannot be a book in the Greek sense, for there cannot be human authors who decide in the sovereign fashion what is to be the beginning and the end and who refuse admission to everything that is not evidently necessary for the purpose of the book. In other words, the purpose of the Bible, as a book, partakes of the mysterious character of the divine purpose. Man is not master of how to begin; before he begins to write he is already confronted with writings, with the holy writings, which impose their law on him. He may modify these holy writings, compile these holy writings, so as to make out of them a single writing as the compilers of the Old Testament probably did, but he can do this only in a spirit of humility and reverence. His very piety may compel him to alter the texts of the holy writings which came down to him. He may do this for reasons of piety because certain passages in an older source may lend themselves to misunderstanding, which is grave. He may change, therefore, but his principle will always be to change as little as possible. He will exclude not everything that is not evidently necessary for an evident purpose but only what is evidently incompatible with a purpose whose ground is hidden. The sacred book, the Bible, may then abound in contradictions and in repetitions which are not intended, whereas a Greek book, the greatest example being the Platonic dialogue, reflects the perfect evidence to which the philosopher aspires; there is nothing which does not have a knowable ground because Plato had a ground. The Bible reflects in its literary form the inscrutable mystery of the ways of God which it would be impious even to attempt to comprehend.